MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO PISA

Consultation by
Anglophone Sector

Minister's Response to PISA

The PISA results for New Brunswick students have generated much discussion both inside and outside the education community. Parents have questioned how well prepared New Brunswick students are for post secondary opportunities. Educators have reflected upon the curriculum, assessment and instructional practices. Some public discussions have taken place in the media.

In response to these questions, the Minister organized a series of consultations at the school district level and at the Department of Education. Consultations involved students, parents, District Education Council Members, teachers, and administrators. The consultations took place from March to June, 2002.

A presentation of the results of the consultations follows.

OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE PISA RESULTS

Group 1: Parents and DEC Representatives

- Disappointed with the results of boys in general and with the performance of the highest achieving girls
- Is there a relationship between New Brunswick curriculum and external assessments such as PISA
- Concerned with the continual reduction of teachers while the needs within the system grow
- Concerned with student time on task
- The cohort of students who wrote PISA experienced significant organization and curricular changes

Group 2: Students

- Results may reflect a lack of pride in schools
- Results may be reflective of New Brunswick society where few value education
- Concerned with achievement results of boys
- Questioned how low student achievement will impact on post secondary careers when New Brunswick students are competing with students from other provinces

Group 3: Teachers

- Surprised that New Brunswick results are below other Atlantic provinces
- Questioned the seriousness teachers and students gave to the test
- What grade promotion guidelines were in place over the educational experience for this group of students

Group 4: School / District / Department

- Concerned with overall achievement results; an action plan is required
- Need for strong leadership to address results
- Concerned with low academic expectations and lack of performance standards
- Questioned whether one factor influencing low results is the overall composition of the classroom
- Are teachers properly in-serviced and is curriculum effectively implemented?

INFLUENCES THAT MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE PISA RESULTS

Group 1: Parents and DEC Representatives

- Constant change in curriculum; insufficient professional development
- Time spent on discipline, inappropriate behaviour, etc.
- Low expectations, given the absence of the clearly defined performance standard
- Composition of classes as a result of immersion and integration
- Lack of parental involvement
- Teachers instructing in subject areas for which they do not have the required background

Group 2: Students

- The need for teachers who
  - are well trained in the subject area
  - want to teach, and
  - who can appropriately adapt curriculum to address student needs
- Inconsistency in the application of rules for all students
- Insufficient opportunities for all students to participate in extracurricular activities
- Insufficient opportunities for all students to have a voice and to represent their schools (lower level students do not have a chance to express themselves)

Group 3: Teachers

- Need for a clear vision and resources to meet the vision
- Absence of clear performance standards and benchmarks at particular levels of the system
- Limited parental involvement to support student behaviour and achievement
- The impact of Immersion on student achievement

Group 4: School / District / Department

- The curriculum implementation process and alignment with assessment
- Inconsistency in academic/curricular expectations
- Need for strong stable leadership
- Concerned with teacher preservice training and lack of ongoing professional development
- Unacceptable number of students acquiring a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy

PRIORITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Group 1: Parents and DEC Representatives

- Minimize curriculum changes while improving the implementation process
- Focus on literacy and numeracy in the early years
- Examine / develop programs to address student discipline
- Help parents understand their role in supporting student achievement
- Provide support for non or low achieving students, as well as special needs students
- Examine the impact of the French Immersion program and inclusionary practices
- Provide more vocational courses; too much focus on preparation for university when fewer than 30% of students go to university

Group 2: Students

- Ensure that teachers are qualified and competent within their subject area and can adapt curriculum to meet the needs of the students
- Provide support at all levels of the system for the wide range of student abilities
- Ensure students have access to:
  - current resources,
  - variety of textual material
  - up-to-date lab facilities
  - variety of courses, regardless of school size
- Decrease class size

Group 3: Teachers

- Provide ongoing in-service opportunities for all staff to support curriculum implementation
- Limit the pace of the introduction of curriculum change
- Provide additional support for discipline and positive learning environments
- Recognize the critical importance of the early years for future learning success
- Enhance teacher professional development; provide opportunities for staff to discuss effective teaching strategies and promising practices for all students
- Identify performance standards for all curricula to be consistently applied across the province
- Provide a variety of program opportunities at all levels to meet individual needs (grouping and regrouping strategies K-12 with support)

Group 4: School / District / Department

- Strengthen data analysis of provincial assessments by staff at schools
- Provide adequate time throughout the school year to support curriculum implementation and for educators to reflect upon current practice
- Introduce curriculum changes at a reasonable pace
- Recognize the critical importance of the early years for future learning
- Identify performance standards at key stages of the system
- Recognize that assessment is an integral part of the instructional process and ensure accountability of this practice

Synthesis of Consultations: Planning for Improvement

Theme 1: Higher Expectations

- The development of standards for success in achieving curriculum outcomes is essential. Educators, parents and students need to know what students are expected to learn, the level of performance and behaviour that is required for success.
- Expectations / performance standards must be clearly articulated throughout the system
- Performance standards are developed with exit outcomes at key grade levels; e.g. grade 2, 5, 8 and graduation

Theme 2: Organization for Success in the Classroom

- Develop a vision to realize a culture of learning, including a common vision among parents, students and teachers. Develop communication strategies to ensure the vision is apparent and understood
- Ensure classrooms are focused on teaching and learning
- Involve a cross-section of stakeholders in the development of solutions for students who choose not to follow school/classroom rules
- Ensure classes have qualified and competent teachers who are accountable for student achievement
- Review Policy 309 to determine if the costs of the program match the expected outcome
- Clearly define inclusionary practices and inform all stakeholders

Theme 3: Curriculum Assessment

- The pace of curriculum change needs to slow down. An improved process for curriculum development and implementation should be identified and monitored
- Data from provincial and district assessments that teachers, schools and districts use to assess student and program success needs to be provided in a timely manner and in a format that is meaningful for accurate interpretation and usage
- Curriculum and assessment practices need a stronger alignment. Teachers require in-service and time to develop a variety of assessment strategies. Teachers require a thorough understanding of the role of outcomes in curriculum delivery and the match of outcomes to assessment practices
- Teachers require in-service to:
  - develop a variety of assessment strategies
  - gain a thorough understanding of curriculum and the role of defined outcomes
  - match outcomes to assessment practices

Theme 4: Interangency Involvement

- Interagency cooperation is required to support students from conception to graduation if all students are to reach the goal of high achievement.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

Focus on Early Literacy (K-2)

- Development of K-2 action plans by each District
- Organize literacy leadership workshops for school administrators
- Establish literacy performance standards for K-2

Planning for Success K to 12

- Identify a committee to establish curriculum performance standards at key stages (grades 2, 5, 8 and 12); the committee will establish a mandate, terms of reference, and agreed upon time-lines for completion of this task
- Present draft key-stage performance standards in literacy and numeracy by October, 2002
- Examine FI, FSL, and Inclusion to determine if costs match desired outcomes and take appropriate action
- Implement the School Education Review Process for all district within three years
- Maximize instructional hours in all grade levels throughout the province
- Clarify the policy on inclusion and related practices
- Identify promising practices of effective intervention to support student learning
- Train district personnel to perform data analysis to allow for meaningful use of information gained from assessment
- Inservice teachers on accountability practices which will inform instruction
- Inform students and parents of what students are expected to learn, the level of performance and behaviour that is required for success

Stabilize the System

- Curriculum is developed through a commonly understood process. Develop a more effective curriculum review process to regulate the rate of change
- Communicate the successes of Governance and the need to retain this system for several years
- Identify professional development opportunities for teachers within the school calendar

Throughout all of this, a culture of learning is promoted through a strong, ongoing communication plan. "Choosing not to grow is not an option".